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FM AMEMBASSY DILI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2571  
INFO RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0443  
RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE  
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DILI 000262

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 5/24/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [MARR](#) [TT](#)  
SUBJECT: EAST TIMOR REQUESTS FOREIGN MILITARY INTERVENTION; PRIME  
MINISTER MAY RESIGN

REF: (A) DILI 189; (B) DILI 203; (C) DILI 213; (D) DILI 219; (E) DILI 220; (F)  
DILI 226; (G) STATE 75819; (H) DILI 229

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CLASSIFIED BY: Grover Joseph Rees, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy  
Dili, Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Classified by Ambassador Grover Joseph Rees for reasons 1(b) &  
(d).

[¶1.](#) (S) Summary: East Timor's four top government leaders today announced that the government would request military intervention from Australia, New Zealand, Portugal, and Malaysia to restore order and to end what President Xanana Gusmao called "this climate of panic." Foreign Minister Jose Ramos-Horta made clear that the Government of East Timor (GOET) hoped that Australia would have military forces on the ground in Timor within the next 24 hours to prevent further deterioration of the security situation, with other nations perhaps responding to the request later. In a smaller meeting just after the public announcement, Ramos-Horta said it is "highly likely" that Prime Minister Alkatiri will offer his resignation within the next few days as another essential component in restoring peace and stability, and that if Alkatiri does not resign the President will convene the Council of State in order to invoke the constitutional procedure for the dismissal of the Prime Minister. Ramos-Horta indicated that he himself would likely then be asked to serve as interim Prime Minister pending the next Parliamentary elections, and that he would request the United Nations to conduct these elections. End Summary.

[¶2.](#) (U) In a meeting this afternoon attended by most GOET Cabinet members, heads of foreign diplomatic missions in Dili, and representatives of the Catholic Church, President Xanana Gusmao

announced that he and other top GOET leaders were requesting foreign intervention to restore order in East Timor and to end what he called "this climate of panic." The President announced that a joint letter signed by himself, Prime Minister Alkatiri, President of Parliament Francisco Lu'Olo Guterres, and Foreign Minister Ramos-Horta would be sent to the government of Australia this afternoon, and that similar requests would be made to the governments of Portugal, New Zealand, and Malaysia. Gusmao said the letter would request that Australia provide "a robust police presence backed by a military force." Foreign Minister Ramos-Horta then explained that there was widespread support among the Timorese public for the proposed intervention, and that the mere presence of the requested forces would have a deterrent effect that could well make combat engagements unnecessary, since "there is no faction in Timor that is interested in fighting with international forces." Prime Minister Alkatiri and President of Parliament Lu'Olo, who had reportedly resisted the request for Australian intervention, sat beside the President and the Foreign Minister but did not speak.

Ramos-Horta made clear that the security situation was deteriorating rapidly, with pitched gun battles between members of the armed forces (FDTL) and dissident FDTL members supported by elements in the national police (PNTL). He said GOET hoped the requested Australian forces could be on the ground in Timor "within 24 hours" in order to prevent further fighting.

13. (S) Ramos-Horta then asked Ambassador Rees and Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (DSRSG) Anis Bajwa to remain for a smaller meeting. This meeting was also attended by President Gusmao's Chief of Staff, Agio Pereira, and by the Ambassador of New Zealand. Ramos-Horta explained that foreign military intervention is only one of the steps necessary to restore peace and stability in East Timor. He said the other key step is the resignation of Prime Minister Alkatiri. According to Ramos-Horta, in his own recent travels around the country he has encountered a broad popular consensus that Alkatiri's removal is essential to restoring public confidence in Government. See Ref H. Ramos-Horta also said that Bishop Alberto Ricardo Da Silva of Dili, whom the Government had asked

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to tour troubled districts in the western part of East Timor in an effort to restore calm, had reported a similar consensus. (Note: Bishop Ricardo, who rarely attends government functions, was present at today's announcement of the request for foreign intervention.) Ramos-Horta said President Gusmao is "particularly insistent" that Alkatiri must resign or be removed, that the matter has been discussed with Alkatiri, and that it is "highly likely" he will resign within the next few days. Ramos-Horta said he expected that he himself would then be asked to serve as Prime Minister, which he would agree to do on an interim basis until the next election. He said he would retain all but a few of the current Cabinet members and that he would ask the United Nations to "conduct" --- rather than just to assist and monitor --- the elections in order to ensure that they were administered capably and fairly.

14. (S) Ramos-Horta said that if Alkatiri does not resign, the President will convene the Council of State in order to invoke the provision of Article 112 of the Constitution for the removal of the Prime Minister "when necessary to ensure the regular functioning of the democratic institutions." See Refs F & H. He said the President would also consider dissolving Parliament so as to bring about an election sooner rather than later, but he acknowledged that the constitutional provisions on dissolving Parliament are more restrictive than the provision allowing the President to dismiss the Prime Minister.

15. (S) Embassy Dili has learned that the Government of Australia (GOA) has received the formal written GOET request and that negotiations are underway and could proceed very quickly.

16. (S) Comment: The inclusion of Portugal and Malaysia in the list of countries whose assistance would be requested was apparently to satisfy the Prime Minister, who would have preferred an all-Portuguese or an all-Malaysian force to one

containing any Australians at all. The particular Portuguese and Malaysian paramilitary police units that will be the subject of these invitations have both served in East Timor before, and both had a reputation for training Timorese police to use excessive levels of force. The Prime Minister had also submitted a draft letter that required the Australian forces to operate "in co-ordination with the Prime Minister's office." Ramos-Horta insisted on changing this to "in co-ordination with the President and the Prime Minister."

¶7. (S) Comment continued: One possible sticking point in the impending GOET-GOA negotiations is that the elements in FDTL that have been most prominent in the recent military operations --- and who are generally regarded by Timorese as one of several warring armed groups rather than as protectors of peace and stability --- might be unwilling to retire to their barracks and leave the field to the Australian forces. Ramos-Horta privately acknowledged today that this is a "sensitive issue" and suggested that perhaps FDTL could retain responsibility for security in the three eastern districts, which have not experienced serious security problems, while leaving Dili and the troubled western districts to the Australians.

¶8. (S) Comment continued: Although Embassy Dili's Timorese sources overwhelmingly agree with Foreign Minister Ramos-Horta's assessment that Alkatiri's resignation or removal would be a big step toward restoring public confidence in the Government, his assessment that Alkatiri is "highly likely" to resign soon may underestimate the Prime Minister's tenacity. Indeed, whatever pressure Alkatiri may now feel to resign would presumably be substantailly reduced if the presence of Australian forces succeeds in quickly restoring peace and stability. End Comment.

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